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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 002313

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [OSCE](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES GOT ANTI-MISSIONARY CAMPAIGN WITH A FILIBUSTERING MINISTER AYDIN

REF: A. ANKARA 1511

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1935

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric S. Edelman; reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador has emphasized to State Minister Aydin serious U.S. concerns about the GOT's anti-Christian missionary campaign, including a written statement by Aydin defining missionaries as a threat to the State and maligning Christianity. The U.S. has long urged the EU to support Turkey's candidacy, but it will be difficult to do so while the GOT is campaigning against Christianity. The Ambassador warned that anti-Christian rhetoric could lead to violence, and urged Aydin to speak in support of the rights of Christians in Turkey. In response, Aydin accused missionaries in Turkey of using anti-Islamic rhetoric, and complained that the U.S. media have said "awful things" about Turkey. After the meeting, we learned that a Protestant church building had been attacked in Ankara. End Summary.

Congress Concerned About Anti-Christian Rhetoric

[1](#)2. (U) Calling on Aydin April 21, the Ambassador noted that the U.S., in its support for Turkey's EU candidacy, has long maintained that the EU should not be a Christian club. President Bush and the U.S. Congress have frequently emphasized their commitment to religious freedom and tolerance among faiths. Now, however, members of Congress are highly concerned about the GOT's campaign against Christian missionaries. The anti-missionary sermon drafted by the GOT's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) and delivered by imams across the country March 11 (reftel A), as well as Aydin's own written response to a question from an MP on the "threat" of missionaries (reftel B), depict missionary activity in Turkey as political rather than religious. Both documents imply that missionaries are a threat to the State.

[1](#)3. (C) The GOT's actions, the Ambassador continued, give the impression that Turkey, whose population is officially 99 percent Muslim, has no room for Christians. The USG's 2005 International Religious Freedom Report (IRF), to be released in September, will reflect these negative developments. If these problems are not addressed, the report will be quite critical. Moreover, these developments threaten Turkey's EU candidacy.

Aydin: Missionaries Use "Non-Theological" Approach

[1](#)4. (U) In a long, filibustering answer, Aydin defensively acknowledged that he signed the statement on missionaries, but said the text was prepared by others, as is the practice. Although Aydin oversees the Diyanet, he claimed he has no direct authority over its sermons. However, he went on to defend indirectly the contents of the sermon and statement. Aydin asserted that missionaries in Turkey are "cheating" by using "non-theological arguments" in attempts to convert Muslims. These arguments often associate Islam with terrorism. For example, missionaries claim that unless "the light of Jesus" is spread throughout the Islamic world, Muslim terrorists will kill everyone. If missionaries were using theological arguments, he asserted, he would "defend them to the end."

[1](#)5. (C) Aydin mused that if he were a "powerful Christian," he would focus his missionary activities in a Western city like London, where church attendance is down. Or maybe in the U.S., where, he said, an 11-year-old boy recently shot his parents. But not in a poor, Muslim country like Turkey (Note: Diyanet officials have accused missionaries of improperly "taking advantage" of poverty in Turkey as a lever for converting Muslims. At the same time core institutions of the Turkish State -- including CHOD Ozkok in his landmark April 20 speech -- accuse Islamist groups of exploiting poor people to undermine the authority of the secular system. End Note).

[1](#)6. (U) Aydin opined that the 2005 IRF will be positive, because there are no problems (sic) with the "authentic"

religious minorities in Turkey -- the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jews. The controversy only involves others who have come to Turkey recently to convert Muslims.

U.S. Respects Freedom For Muslims

17. (C) The Ambassador said it is not up to the GOT, or any other government, to determine which arguments are "theological" and which are not. There are many mosques in the U.S., where many imams who are not U.S. citizens preach. The USG does not restrict their activities or control the content of their sermons. In fact, many preach beliefs that are inimical to the U.S., as demonstrated by a recent Freedom House study on Saudi hate propaganda in U.S. mosques. Yet the GOT sees fit to combat the "threat" of a tiny Protestant community whose missionaries, according to Aydin's own statement, have converted 368 Turks in 12 years.

18. (U) Charging that Muslims are no longer given free rein in the U.S., Aydin accused U.S. authorities of now closely monitoring mosque activities for security reasons. When the Ambassador denied this, Aydin said the USG might not monitor mosques, but private groups do (Note: He was apparently referring to the Freedom House study. End Note).

19. (C) The Ambassador reiterated that the GOT's actions have raised serious concerns in Congress, at a time when lawmakers are preparing to review a resolution on the Armenian "genocide." Both the sermon and Aydin's statement imply that missionaries in Turkey today are equivalent to the soldiers of the Crusades. They also imply that Christianity is a polytheistic religion, the same argument used by Muslim extremists such as terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. When Aydin denied the GOT made such an implication, the Ambassador quoted from the sermon, which states that the Crusades failed because Islam "contains values such as monotheism, justice, fear of God, self confidence, and opposition to oppression, polytheism, blasphemy and injustice." Aydin replied that the sermon made a "general comparison" between the two religions.

110. (U) Aydin asserted that the U.S. media have said "awful things" about Turkey, and the USG claims it can take no action because it respects freedom of speech. The GOT, in similar fashion, has to respect the rights of the Diyanet to express itself. The Ambassador replied that the Diyanet is a state institution, whose sermons are delivered by imams across the country. Aydin blandly asserted that the Diyanet is "as independent as any Catholic institution," and claimed he has only "friendly influence" over it.

Rhetoric Could Lead to Violence

111. (C) The Ambassador urged Aydin to use his influence to promote tolerance toward religious minorities. Leaders of Turkey's tiny Protestant community, numbering approximately 3,000, have been receiving increasing telephone and email threats as anti-missionary rhetoric from the government and media has emerged in recent months. The GOT's anti-missionary campaign could lead to violence, especially given the rise of nationalism in Turkey these days. Aydin said he does not expect violence, and averred that he, like most Turks, would feel "awful" if Muslims attacked Christians. The Ambassador said Aydin and other GOT leaders could help lower tensions by publicly stating that Christians are welcome in Turkey and that missionary activity is accepted. Aydin claimed he has made such statements in the past.

112. (U) Shortly after the meeting, a contact informed us that two people threw Molotov cocktails into the International Protestant Church of Ankara in the early morning hours of April 21. The building was empty at the time. We will report in more detail septel.

Comment

113. (C) Aydin spent the meeting scrambling and rambling to avoid responsibility for his comments about Christianity. First he asserted he only "signed" the statement and has only "influence" over the Diyanet, then he tried repeatedly to change the subject. When pinned down, he could only defend his statements with wild, unsubstantiated allegations that missionaries in Turkey (across the board, apparently) use anti-Islamic arguments. Frankly, we expected a bit more from a scholar of theology.

114. (C) Aydin started the meeting by criticizing incoming Pope Benedict XVI for comments he made as a cardinal stating that Turkey, as a Muslim country, should not be accepted in

the EU. Now that he is Pope, Aydin averred, Benedict should promote dialogue and understanding among religions, building on the efforts of Pope John Paul II. We can only hope that Aydin, whose surname means "enlightened," learns to heed his own advice.

EDELMAN